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EVALUATE THE VIEW THAT POETRY AND FILM DISTORT OUR VIEW OF WAR.

By Sancia B

When we think of war, we imagine it could be costly, bloody, and virtually always bad for both sides. This is the harsh and cruel reality of war, that pushes us to take sides and many poems and films emphasise these preconceptions.

One such World War One poem is 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' by Wilfred Owen, where the poet cleverly uses onomatopoeic language to mimic the sound of gunfire in the line "rifles' rapid rattle"⁰¹. Just the title itself implies a requiem for the fallen soldiers who lost their lives during WW1. In the first line, "What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?"⁰², the word 'cattle' makes the reader think of a cattle auction, where the soldiers are being sold off to their likely deaths. Moreover, Owen then goes on to say that there were "no prayers nor bells [...] shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells"⁰³, meaning no funerals took place on the battlefield and the only things that truly 'mourned them' were the shells and bombs that killed them. Both these quotes emphasise a nihilistic outlook on life as they suggest that the soldiers are not important and for that reason, life is not worth living. This poem was written by Owen in 1917 as he lay in hospital, recovering from battlefield trauma and injuries.

A recent World War II film that has greatly affected many of its viewers and portrays the war as what it really was, is Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* starring Liam Neeson and Ralph Fiennes.⁰⁴ This blockbuster is based on the true story of Oskar Schindler, who helped to free over 1,000 Jews deported to concentration camps. Throughout its entirety, the film includes symbolic images that give more of a show-not-tell feeling to the watcher. A perfect example of this is a candle's flame being extinguished at the beginning of the film, which indicates the peace itself being 'extinguished' by the prospect of a war, then denotes the cremation of millions of bodies at the concentration camp. The people watching this harrowing film are reminded of the horrors of the Holocaust and how over six million Jews were persecuted and violently murdered by the Nazis. The film, in my opinion, is one that does not distort peoples' views on war in the slightest. In one of the scenes, Spielberg physically depicts the gas chambers and the full horrors of the Holocaust. The quote "Whoever saves one life saves the world entire", is also

⁰¹ Wilfred Owen, 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. Jon Stallworthy, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990) p. 76, line 3.

⁰² Owen, p. 76, line 1.

⁰³ Owen, p. 76, lines 5-8.

⁰⁴ *Schindler's List*, dir. by Steven Spielberg (Universal Pictures, 1993).

shown towards the end of the film to commemorate Schindler and everything he had done. It explains that one man can be effective as these eight words capture the sentiments of the full film.

Another World War I screen version that succeeds in depicting the torment of war, but at the same time makes you see it from a different perspective, is 2022's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, directed by Edward Berger.⁰⁵ It successfully portrays the grim brutality of World War I, however, this film does have the possibility of distorting one's view of war. It follows what we might think is "the enemy side", but the storyline is made much more interesting as one might not be used to a war from different perspectives. In the film, there are a plethora of horrific scenes detailing what the German soldiers might have gone through at the time and many of them are extremely bloody. A quote from the film that I found a true analysis of the war is "All that's separating us from an armistice is false pride". It is spoken by the character of Matthias Erzberger, who says that it is only the commander's pride that is causing more and more of his soldiers to die each day. Bäumer's character realises that war is not, in fact, a victory to flaunt in front of other countries, but ultimately a fight to the death, and watching all of his fellow comrades die in front of him does nothing but confirm this view.

A World War II poem that has an extremely sad meaning behind it is 'The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner' by Randall Jarrell. The poem is told, incredibly, in just five lines, yet somehow manages to elicit deep emotion in the reader. The ball turret gunner described is the vital crewman whose lonely task it is to protect the underbelly of the bomber aircraft alone in a tiny womb-like sphere. This is why the poet personifies the plane representing a mother. In contrast to the womb in which a baby grows, this particular one is labelled as dreadful and lethal. Rising into the sky, the gunner feels that he is "loosed from the dream" of ordinary waking life.⁰⁶ When they "washed me out of the turret with a hose" it is because he has been blown to bits by an enemy plane.⁰⁷ By explicitly describing this protagonist's gory death, the poet invites readers to delve into more general wartime tragedies.

During the war, many poets and film directors were encouraged – or even via government censorship forced – to create pieces of entertainment conveying messages of patriotism which often greatly distorted peoples' views on battle and war. They illustrated the wars as heroic, valiant, and justified acts of service to your country.

In contrast to the first poem listed ('Anthem for Doomed Youth'), the World War I poem 'Who's for the Game?' by Jessie Pope (1915) provided the contemporary

⁰⁵ *All Quiet on the Western Front*, dir. by Edward Berger (Netflix, 2022).

⁰⁶ Randall Jarrell, 'The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner', *The Complete Poems* (London: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1980) line 3.

⁰⁷ Jarrell, lines 5.

reader with a sense of optimism that the war would, in fact, ‘only last until Christmas’. In the title, the word ‘Game’ is used as an extended metaphor to paint the war as something sporty that is easily winnable, even enjoyable, giving young men, her target audience, false hope that they could win the war. Pope also writes in a conversational manner, suggesting her reluctance to admit to the countless fatalities and injuries the soldiers would endure over the next three years. Additionally, the upbeat tone she uses makes it seem like Pope seriously underplays the severity of the situation that the soldiers have to face. Being written in 1915, it was published just as men were being conscripted. Throughout, there is a feeling of extreme patriotism, derogatorily described as ‘jingoism’, especially in the last two lines of the poem (“Your country is up to her neck [...] calling for you”), where the determiner ‘Your’ gives the young men enlisting something to fight for.⁰⁸ Pope also personifies Britain the country as a damsel in distress, stating that ‘she’ needs protecting.

In many cases, comedy films also had the potential to warp realistic perceptions of war. This is certainly true in the World War II film *Stalag 17*.⁰⁹ Released in 1953, it tells the day-to-day experiences of 630 US aviators held in a German prisoner-of-war camp. The film stars, William Holden, Don Taylor, and Robert Strauss, as they plan to escape through underground tunnels they had spent months laboriously building. Billed as a comedy, it definitely has multiple comic moments throughout. Indeed, there were many war comedies brought out during and around the time of the war, largely intended to boost morale both for troops overseas and their families back at home. The comedy could clearly distort the truth. *Stalag 17*’s director Billy Wilder improved the impression of wartime captivity. He didn’t show the appalling living conditions that the pilots were confined to live in. The German enemy are even pictured as friendly, with the German guards depicted as humorous and jovial, without a moment where they seriously mistreat the American prisoners. The comedy dilutes the horrendous reality.

Finally, one of the most beautiful World War II films is, in my opinion, *La Vita è Bella*, directed by Roberto Benigni in 1997.¹⁰ As a romantic drama, one of the themes explored throughout is what has been described as ‘sentimental fantasy’. In the section where Guido (Benigni) uses his imagination to essentially shield his young son Giosué from the brutal truth of the Holocaust, he turns what is a truly awful moment in history into a light-hearted adventure game. The film is set in Fascist Italy during the Second World War. As it is fundamentally a love story between Guido and Dora, his wife, the audience is constantly reminded of the power of love,

⁰⁸ Jessie Pope, ‘Who’s for the Game?’, *Simple Rhymes for Stirring Times* (London: Arthur Pearson, 1916) lines 16-17.

⁰⁹ *Stalag 17*, dir. by Billy Wilder (Paramount, 1953).

¹⁰ *La Vita è Bella*, dir. by Roberto Benigni (Cecchi Gori Distribuzione, 1997).

even flourishing in this extreme moment of horror. This Italian film is undoubtedly sentimental and has a truly heartbreaking ending, with Guido being shot by the Nazis, whilst unbeknownst to his son, whom Guido protected during what would have been one of the very darkest times for everyone in the concentration camp.

In conclusion, I believe that there is definitely a vast anthology of poems and films that distort peoples' views of war. However, I feel that the date of their individual release in relation to the relevant conflict can explain their perspective. I personally think that they had the ability to bring forth multiple feelings about the war; some were even so powerful that they made you feel a close connection to a soldier you didn't even know existed!

IS HUMAN NATURE GOOD OR EVIL?

By Henrietta H

Human beings lie, betray and lead wars, and sometimes it can seem like evil is typically human. On the other hand, human beings can be extremely good, love and care for one another and even make peace with their enemies. The question if human nature is good or evil has always been one of the most discussed topics of humankind. The theme features in many areas of the arts – theatre plays, paintings and literature – and has been analysed by numerous scientists with the goal to understand human nature better.

Before discussing this question, it is important to state that there is no universal definition of what is good and what is evil in this world. Most people are quick to come up with their own definitions for these abstract terms, depending on their personal life situations, cultures, or religions. Although we seem to be able to agree on a number of basic ‘ground rules’ - do not steal, do not lie, do not kill - a lot of them are transient and depend strongly on interpretation. Depending on the situation at hand, the good thing can quickly turn out to be evil and vice versa. Even if it is generally good to tell the truth, there are moments when it is kinder to keep the truth to yourself.

Many sciences have looked into the topic of good and evil, the first being philosophy. In Ancient Greece it was Aristotle who introduced ethics as its own philosophical discipline.⁰¹ Ethics discusses things like values, norms and customs in a society that we also know as morals. It is fundamentally the things that a society regards as right or wrong. As already mentioned in the introduction, these values are by no means static, but merely a mirror of the times we live in. Ethics instructs people to use their common sense and to align all their decisions with the current moral values of the society they live in. It can be seen as an instruction manual for living together in this world. Aristotle based this on two basic ideas: 1. An action is good when it is useful to most and 2. Certain things can never be good and should therefore not be done.

Very similar moral values can also be found in different religions all over the world. In many cases the good is represented by some form of God or higher power that watches over and judges the people’s actions. In Christianity, for example, the good has a direct opponent in the devil. He is the personification of evil and his realm is hell, a place of everlasting torture and damnation for sinners, those who have acted against Christian values during their lives. In order to get to heaven,

⁰¹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by David Ross, ed. by Lesley Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

the realm of God, the people have to lead a life that pleases God following the Christian guidelines like the Ten Commandments.⁰² One should not steal or lie or kill – even outside of the religious context, these rules make sense and have been adapted by many societies in the world, larger groups of people that want to live together.

The first scientific studies on the topic of good and evil were done by anthropologists who suspected that being evil might be something you are born with and can be detected in your body. At the end of the 19th century, the Italian prison doctor Cesare Lombroso analysed the skull shape of serious criminals and came up with the ‘homo delinquens’.⁰³ He believed that criminals carried evil traits in them since birth, and that you could see this by looking at the shape of their heads. According to Lombroso, criminals have enormous jawbones, large eye sockets and receding foreheads. He also thought that sexual predators had broad lips and thieves had crooked noses. His theories were all completely unfounded but were picked up again by the Nazis as part of their race theory.

In various experiments, psychologists have attempted to learn more about when and why human beings behave in evil ways. In the 1960s, psychologist Stanley Milgram conducted a series of studies on the concepts of obedience and authority.⁰⁴ In the Milgram experiment, obedience was measured by the level of shock that the participant was willing to deliver. While many of the subjects became extremely agitated, distraught, and angry at the experimenter, they nevertheless continued to follow orders all the way to the end. The Stanford-Prison-Experiment, that was conducted in the 1970s by US psychologists, had a similar outcome.⁰⁵ Students were separated in two groups - prisoners and prison guards – and were put into various challenging situations. The experiment had to be terminated very quickly due to the extreme behaviour of the participants.

Nowadays, psychologists mostly agree that human nature is mostly good. German psychologist Reinhard Haller believes that every person has an innate moral compass to tell us what is good or evil, right or wrong.⁰⁶ But we must understand that sometimes this compass fails – when we act in a state of frenzy, rage, or on impulse. In these situations, human beings are literally blind with emotion and can

⁰² *Holy Bible*, English Standard Version (London: Crossway Bibles, 2007), Exodus 20.1-17.

⁰³ Cesare Lombroso, *The Criminal Man*, trans. by Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (London: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁰⁴ Stanley Milgram, ‘Behavioral Study of Obedience’, *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67.4 (1963), 371-378.

⁰⁵ Craig Haney, Curtis Banks, and Philip Zimbardo, ‘Interpersonal dynamics in a simulated prison’, *International Journal of Criminology and Penology*, 1 (1973) 69-97.

⁰⁶ Reinhard Haller, *Das Böse: Die Psychologie der menschlichen Destruktivität*, 3rd edition (ecoWing, 2020).

no longer control themselves. According to evolution anthropologist Brian Hare, human beings are not evil at all. He bases this on the theory of self-domestication: the human race could only be so successful because it has undergone a long evolution to cooperation and friendliness.⁰⁷ This means that for any civilised society, it is preferable to prioritise the good resulting in a peaceful cooperation. Most people will profit from this approach as they will be able to thrive in a stable and future-oriented system.

In psychology, being evil is not considered a diagnosis which is why they would never describe anyone as an evil person. Most of the character traits that we see as evil are described by psychologists as malignant narcissism.⁰⁸ Scientists have found that 98% of US serial killers have suffered from this syndrome. It can also be found in most great tyrants of humanity: Ivan the Terrible, Emperor Nero, Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin. It is not a mental illness rather than an extreme form of personality disorder. Luckily, there aren't many of these truly evil people in the world. Psychologist Haller believes it to be about 0.01%. They only become a problem when they manage to gain power over others.

In conclusion, you cannot say that human nature is good or evil. From a biological perspective, everyone is born the same and there are no physiological attributes that define you as good or evil. We can assume that human beings have the tendency to be reasonably good as they have discovered that the survival and forthcoming of their species works better in a peaceful and cooperative society. But it is clear, that under certain circumstances, human beings are capable of extreme amounts of aggression and cruelty.

⁰⁷ Brian Hare and Vanessa Woods, *Survival of the Friendliest: Understanding Our Origins and Rediscovering Our Common Humanity* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2020).

⁰⁸ Richard Wood, *A Study of Malignant Narcissism: Personal and Professional Insights* (London: Routledge, 2022).

ARE WE BORN GOOD OR EVIL?

by Sarah M

In this essay, I will discuss whether we are born either good or evil or if our childhood affects our adult actions. In the past few centuries in our world, we have seen many atrocious evils, from the Holocaust to persecution of groups of people in the Israel - Palestine war. Some would argue that we are born either good or evil and rarely, some people are born just evil, however, I would argue that we are all born with a little good in us at birth and it is our upbringings, childhoods and early experiences that really shape us. When I asked people to name someone who they thought was evil the response was normally “Hitler”, so I will look at Adolf Hitler as a case study to whether he was born evil or raised evil as most people see him as an evil person. Adolf Hitler was the leader of the Nazi party and was responsible for the deaths and persecution of thousands of Jews and Romanis in the Holocaust. I will explore the science of an ‘evil gene’, the religious concepts surrounding being born good, and various psychological experiments to weigh up the arguments on human behavior and moral.

I believe that we are all born good, our experiences drive us to evil. The Jewish Torah and Christian Old Testament both say that God made us “in his image.”⁰¹ Jews and Christians believe that we are born in God’s image, a little like him with some goodness in us. Some people believe that Hitler started life as a normal boy who loved painting and it was the Academy of Fine Arts rejecting him in 1908 to send him to art school that turned him into a psychopath.⁰² Furthermore, there are accounts of his father whipping a dog to death.⁰³ All children look up to their parents as their examples, especially boys with their fathers. We all start life the same as pure, new babies, it is our early experiences and upbringings which drive us to evil.

A study conducted by BBC Earth involved showing ten- to twelve-month-olds a puppet show where a red circle was trying to get up a hill, a mean blue square pushed it down but a nice yellow triangle helped it up the hill.⁰⁴ At the end of the show the infants were offered all the shapes on a tray and the majority chose the

⁰¹ *Holy Bible*, English Standard Version (London: Crossway Bibles, 2007), Genesis 1.27.

⁰² Sarah Pruitt, *When Hitler Tried (and Failed) to be an Artist* (2023), *History* <<https://www.history.com/news/adolf-hitler-artist-paintings-vienna>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

⁰³ *Are Some People Born Evil?* (2012), *The Standard* <<https://www.standard.co.uk/hp/front/are-some-people-born-evil-7266828.html>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

⁰⁴ Tom Aglietti, *Are we born good or evil? (naughty or nice)* (n.d.), *BBC Earth* <<https://www.bbcearth.com/news/are-we-born-good-or-evil-naughty-or-nice>> [accessed 11 January 2024].

nice yellow triangle which shows that even at as young as ten months we still have a moral compass which we were born with. A similar study at Harvard went on to prove that the infants chose the ‘good’ not because it was a learned behaviour but an instinct.⁰⁵ Ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius used the example of a child falling down a well to show that we are all born good and have goodness in us, it is our experiences which drive us to evil.⁰⁶ The instant reaction of the observer is alarm and distress, not to gain friendship and admiration from the child’s parents and not a fear of the reputation they may gain if they do not rescue the child. Mencius explains how this shows we all have a natural good instinct.

However, some people believe that it is possible for a baby to be born just evil. Scientists have discovered an ‘evil’ gene called MAOA which controls whether we produce an enzyme called monoamine oxidase, which at low levels has been linked to violence and aggression in mice; approximately 8% of children are born with high MAOA.⁰⁷ Researchers at King’s College London have found that all three elements of psychological psychopathy can be inherited in genetics from parents: an interpersonal component (lying and manipulativeness), an emotional component (callousness and lack of emotion), and a behavioral component (violence and criminality).⁰⁸ The most commonly inherited element is the callousness and lack of emotion, which is arguably the most dangerous as if you have a lack of emotion you don’t understand how your actions effect people and how people grieve, meaning evils like murder can be carried out without remorse. This study proves that people can be born psychopaths so essentially evil. Norman Mailer’s 2007 novel, *The Castle In The Forest*, follows the early life of Adolf Hitler. The book depicts a two-year-old Hitler watching his father whip a dog to death with a look of “remarkable intensity for one so small” and kissing his brother to infect him with measles and kill him.⁰⁹ While it is not confirmed that these claims are true, if they are it would show that Hitler had that described callousness and lack of emotion described in the King’s College study as he willingly caused his brother’s death.

⁰⁵ Abigail Tucker, *Are babies born bad?* (2013), *Smithsonian Magazine* <<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/are-babies-born-good-165443013/#:~:text=Indeed%2C%20some%20of%20these%20studies,or%20not%20a%20parent%20commanded>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

⁰⁶ Mencius (2019), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* < <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mencius/>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

⁰⁷ David M. Fergusson, Joseph M. Boden, L. John Horwood, Allison L. Miller and Martin A. Kennedy, ‘MAOA, abuse exposure and antisocial behaviour: 30-year longitudinal study’, *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 198.6 (2011) 457–463, doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.110.086991.

⁰⁸ Christian Jarrett, *Can people have a genetic predisposition towards being evil?* (n.d.), *BBC Science Focus* <<https://www.sciencefocus.com/the-human-body/can-people-have-a-genetic-predisposition-towards-being-evil>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

⁰⁹ Norman Mailer, *The Castle in the Forest* (Random House, 2007).

To conclude, although scientists have discovered an 'evil' gene, I believe that babies are born good and it is nurture not nature which drives people to evil. One just has to look at a fresh newborn baby, smiling, innocent of the horrors in our world today, oblivious to what its future may behold to see we are born with good in us. People are not born evil; it is the influence of their parents and any traumatic or unusual experiences which make them evil.

EVALUATE THE VIEW THAT POETRY AND FILM DISTORT OUR VIEW OF WAR

by Margot M

In this essay I will be discussing how poetry and film distort our view of war. I will be considering two poems, the first being 'The Call' by Jessie Pope and the second being 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' by Wilfred Owen, and the film *All Quiet on the Western Front* directed by Edward Berger. I will show how poetry and film have the power to distort our view of war. Focusing particularly on the use of sound in the poems and film, it is possible to see how Pope, Owen and Berger each use the portrayal of sound in different ways that show how war can be interpreted.

'The Call' is a propaganda poem, published in a 1915 newspaper before men were forced to sign up for war, when it was still their personal decision. The poem encourages enlistment in the very first stanza by directly addressing the reader through repeatedly using the word, 'who'.⁰¹ Encouraging and praising enlistment shows how Pope and many others believed fighting in a war for one's country was the right and noble thing to do. She mentions nothing about the realities of war and instead uses playful words such as, "Who's keen on getting fit?" as if war is a breezy little workout, thus distorting it. Pope then guilties the reader, calling on the men directly saying, "you should join the war effort".⁰²

Pope creates a sense of excitement, duty and honour by employing celebratory terms that create an atmosphere of enjoyment, "When the procession comes, Banners and rolling drums", giving the reader the ability to hear the sounds of the celebration in a positive way. Pope used poetry as a tool to distort and hide the grim truth about war, wrapping it in a cloak of lies and propaganda. Pope's work is, therefore, an example of how war "required propaganda to mobilise hatred against the enemy; to convince the population of the justness of the cause; to enlist the active support and cooperation of neutral countries; and to strengthen the support of allies".⁰³ In contrast, 'Anthem for Doomed Youth,' opposes the war, and emphasises the horrible truth of war. Owen does not distort the reality of war, but instead realistically highlights all of its violence. He portrays the unjust

⁰¹ Norma Compton Leadingham, 'Propaganda and Poetry During the Great War' (unpublished master's dissertation, East Tennessee State University, 2008), p.73.

⁰² Jessie Pope, 'The Call', *Scars upon my heart: women's poetry and verse of the First World War*, ed. by Catherine Reilly (London: Virago Press, 2006) p. 88.

⁰³ Ankita Gupta, 'Poetry of "Pity": A War of Words in Poetry of the Great War', *Notions*, Vol. 6 No. 3 (2015), 44-54 (45).

ways soldiers were treated, asking, “For these who die as cattle?”.⁰⁴ This sheds light on how soldiers were seen as unimportant, something without need of love nor care, as if soldiers were cows going off to slaughter or traded for a victory in the gruesome war.

Further, Owen also writes about the battlefield with repetition of ceremonial words such as, ‘passing-bells,’ ‘choirs,’ and ‘bugles.’ Yet Owen’s use of ceremonial words contrasts with Pope’s use of sound as he uses sound to add a heaviness to his poem, leaving the reader to feel empathy for the soldiers as they die on the battlefield without any proper goodbye. Owen uses silence as his sound. There will *not* be any prayers nor bells nor voices of mourners. Whereas Pope’s use of bells is to signify the happiness of fighting in the war, how the soldier is home and has survived. Owen’s portrayal of the war is realistic, genuine and authentic, as he is writing from his own first-hand experience. Pope’s words, by contrast, are not based on the truth of the battlefield, nor her own experiences. Owen’s work is not about propaganda nor distortion. The Wilfred Owen Association directs readers to, “Look in their eyes and in the ashen faces of their womenfolk to learn the truth about war”.⁰⁵

While the two previously mentioned poems take a clear side of being either propaganda or anti-war, movies are more complex. An example of this is *All Quiet on the Western Front* as it is widely accepted as an anti-war film, nonetheless it also has qualities of distortion. French director Francois Truffaut once said, “Every film about war ends up being pro-war”.⁰⁶

The movie, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, has won four Oscars, one of them being for cinematography. The war on screen is portrayed as dull and bleak, due to its lack of colour.⁰⁷ The colours that are present are muted and desolate, and honestly just sad. It is an immersive film to watch, and as with Owen’s poem, ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth,’ they both resonate with the

audience or readers leaving them with a sense of sorrow and sensitivity towards those involved in war. *All Quiet on the Western Front* shows a true version of war. Both Owen and Berger show the gruesome and horrendous conditions in which the soldiers have to fight and discuss real matters without sugar-coating them.

⁰⁴ Wilfred Owen, ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth,’ *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. Jon Stallworthy (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990) p. 76.

⁰⁵ Kenneth Simcox, *Poetry Critique: Anthem for Doomed Youth* (2000), *The Wilfred Owen Association* <<http://www.wilfredowen.org.uk/poetry/anthem-for-doomed-youth>> [accessed 10 January 2024].

⁰⁶ Adam Nayman, ‘1917’ and the Trouble With War Movies (2020), *The Ringer*, <<https://www.theringer.com/movies/2020/1/29/21112768/war-movies-1917-dunkirk-saving-private-ryan-apocalypse-now>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

⁰⁷ *All Quiet on the Western Front*, dir. by Edward Berger (Netflix, 2022).

Screenwriter Ian Stockell comments that *All Quiet on the Western Front* “is 100 percent an anti-war movie, because like the book, it doesn’t glorify war. Rather, it shows the mass destruction as a result.”⁰⁸

The film’s powerful soundtrack surrounds the audience making them feel as if they are in the trenches with the soldiers. It uses discordant sounds that make the audience feel uncomfortable. As with Pope and Owen, Berger also uses repetition to reinforce his ideas. The same toned sound occurs again and again in the film giving a sense of hopelessness. Unlike Pope using sound for joy or Owen’s using lack of sound for emptiness, Berger uses sound for discomfort.

What makes *All Quiet on the Western Front* complex in its position on war could be seen in its sense of heightened drama and intensity. Along with his co-writers, Lesley Paterson and Ian Stokell, Berger removes everything subtle in the book and replaces it with something absurdly bombastic—Berger told journalists that he saw the French as “the good guys in the war”.⁰⁹ Yet all too often *All Quiet on the Western Front* depicts the Germans as ‘the good guys’, while the French are cruel and spiteful villains. By enhancing the plot, Berger and his co-writers push the truth in order to sharpen the viewer’s cinematic experience. Bending the truth and confusing who is ‘the good guy’ and who isn’t could be seen as distortion or it could be seen as a tactic to make the movie more successful.

I believe that poetry and film can be used to either distort or accurately portray war. When used as propaganda, like in Pope’s poem, distortion occurs. In ‘The Call’, we have a piece of propaganda or in other terms, a poem for war. This leads the reader to believe war is something to enjoy with your pals for a good time. However, ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’ by Wilfred Owen captured the pain soldiers had to endure fighting on the battlefield. There is no distortion in Owen’s poem. The movie *All Quiet on the Western Front* is more complicated as while it is known to be strongly against war, it also plays with the truth, not for the sake of propaganda, but instead for artistic purposes.

⁰⁸ Sarah Sicard, ‘*All Quiet on the Western Front*’ is the year’s most anti-war war movie (2023), *Military Times*, <<https://www.militarytimes.com/off-duty/military-culture/2023/03/06/all-quiet-on-the-western-front-is-the-years-most-anti-war-war-movie/>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

⁰⁹ Nicholas Barber, *Germans are right to be incensed by All Quiet on the Western Front: it paints them as the good guys*, (2023), *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/feb/27/german-s-all-quiet-on-the-western-front-novel-film>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

IS HUMAN NATURE GOOD OR EVIL?

by Gabriella C

Are we good or, are we evil? This question has been discussed by many around the world throughout history. This essay will dive into both opinions and conclude that it is neither; human nature is neutral. Firstly, what is human nature? The Oxford Dictionary defines human nature as: “the general psychological characteristics, feelings, and behavioral traits of humankind, regarded as shared by all humans.”⁰¹ Fundamentally, this means that human nature is all of the instincts, feelings, and personalities that make up humankind.

Many people believe that human nature is good, and they have a valid reason to do so; we have created many beautiful things in the world, and so many people are inclined to give their time and effort to others. In an experiment conducted by BBC Earth, babies twelve months and under were shown a simple puppet show portraying a red circle struggling to get up a slope.⁰² The ‘evil’ blue square pushed it down, and the ‘good’ yellow triangle was helping it up. After the puppet show, the babies were given the option of the blue square and yellow triangle to play with. Every single baby chose the ‘good’ yellow triangle; this could indicate that knowing what is right and wrong is “either innate or very, very, early developing”.⁰³ Looking at this experiment, we can see that babies can distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, and thus, we are born knowing what is right. Although this could prove something, we also have to acknowledge the fact that the babies could have chosen the yellow triangle because it was brighter, or easier to grab as it has a point.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a Genevan writer, composer, and philosopher who believed in the goodness of human nature. He said “People in their natural state are basically good. But this natural innocence, however, is corrupted by the evils of society.”⁰⁴ Rousseau is essentially saying it is good, but we humans have been corrupted by the world around us. This is a reasonable argument because we were

⁰¹ ‘Human nature’, *Oxford American Dictionary*, ed. by A. Stevenson & CA. Jewell, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 848.

⁰² Tom Aglietti, *Are we born good or evil? (naughty or nice)* (n.d.), BBC Earth <<https://www.bbcearth.com/news/are-we-born-good-or-evil-naughty-or-nice>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

⁰³ ‘Becoming Social’, *Babies: Their Wonderful World*, BBC 2, 3 December 2018, 21:00, online video recording, YouTube <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWzRFLSucQQ>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

⁰⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Bernard Bosanquet, *The Social Contract: Or, Principles of Political Right* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1895).

all babies once and you could argue that who you are right now depends on how you were raised. If you were raised around evil you may become evil; it's not your fault, but the fault of the people who raised you. This theory, however, is difficult to prove but we can look back at the experiment conducted by the BBC and see that perhaps the babies did have some sense of good and evil.

Although it is reassuring to think that humans are inherently good, there are so many things that prove this wrong. For example, the Milgram Experiment was an investigation to see how far ordinary people would go in harming another in certain circumstances.⁰⁵ A volunteer was given the job of asking questions to someone; if they got the question wrong, the volunteer would shock them from behind a wall and the shock would increase its voltage each time they got a question wrong. The volunteers were told this was for scientific research, but in reality, the people getting shocked were paid actors who pretended to plead and beg for mercy when the shocks started to get higher. In the end, all of the volunteers went to at least 300 volts before they quit and 65% of the volunteers went to the full 450 volts.⁰⁶ This experiment shows how normal people will go to extreme levels of cruelty if they are told to as “relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority”.⁰⁷ Does this mean that human nature is evil or does it just mean that humans will go to severe levels when they are put under pressure? Some would say that this does prove human nature is evil. However, you could argue that society has raised people to follow authority in school, work, politics, and everyday life and when that is challenged, humans will go to something they know: obeying orders, laws, and superiors.

The Stanford Prison Experiment is another experiment focusing on human nature and obedience.⁰⁸ Students at Stanford University volunteered to get paid to be in a ‘prison’ for two weeks. 12 volunteers were picked to be the ‘prisoners’ and 12 were picked to be the ‘guards’. They were told the experiment aimed to recreate a prison environment and the guards were told to treat the other volunteers like ‘prisoners. After just two days the guards had already started to verbally abuse the ‘prisoners’ and after six days the experiment had to be shut down “due to the

⁰⁵ Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to authority: an experimental view* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009).

⁰⁶ *Explanations for Obedience - Milgram (1963) (2021)*, tutor2u <<https://www.tutor2u.net/psychology/reference/explanations-for-obedience-milgram-1963>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

⁰⁷ Milgram, p. 7.

⁰⁸ Craig Haney, Curtis Banks, and Philip Zimbardo, ‘A study of prisoners and guards in a simulated prison’ *Naval Research Review*, 26.9 (1973) 1–17.

emotional breakdowns of prisoners, and excessive aggression of the guards”.⁰⁹

Like the Milgram experiment, these were normal people who, when given power over another, used that power to abuse another person for no good reason. However, some ‘guards’ did afterward argue that because they were told this was a reenactment of prison, they were only acting as they wanted to do their job as guards.

We cannot discuss the good or evil of humanity without discussing war. If human nature is good, then why does war happen? Why do humans kill each other over things that seem so unimportant when you put them next to life itself? Sometimes, war is necessary. If someone starts to attack your country, it is not as if you can pick up your country and everyone in it and run away, the only thing left to do is fight back. But why do people such as Hitler and Mussolini do such horrible things? The sole fact that we have war is evidence that humans can be evil and even if we are naturally ‘good’ we are capable of doing terrible things.

There is one more possibility that human nature is, to put it one way, ‘neutral’. This means that when you are born you are neither good nor bad and it depends on how you were raised to determine if you become a good person or not. Although this is a convincing point and would explain a lot, it doesn’t explain how ordinary people in the Milgram Experiment and the Stanford Prison Experiment became so cruel when they were given the power to, and it also doesn’t explain why the babies in the BBC Experiment all chose the ‘good’ shape even when they were so young.

With all of this in mind, I believe that although there is a lot of evidence on both sides, human nature is born neutral. It means that the way your mind is shaped is determined by how you grew up whether that was around war or friends and family. People can change though, for the better or the worse, and certain aspects of human nature, such as greed, will lead you to become evil if you allow them to. There are also other aspects of human nature such as love which may lead a person to become better. When you are born you don’t have any past experiences or thoughts so how would you know good from bad?

⁰⁹ *The Stanford Prison Experiment* (2022) Saylor Academy <[https://learn.saylor.org/mod/page/view.php?id=36193#:~:text=Zimbardo%20\(1973\)%20had%20intended%20that,Maslach%2C%20a%20recent%20Stanford%20Ph.or.org/mod/page/view.php?id=36193#:~:text=Zimbardo%20\(1973\)%20had%20intended%20that,Maslach%2C%20a%20recent%20Stanford%20Ph](https://learn.saylor.org/mod/page/view.php?id=36193#:~:text=Zimbardo%20(1973)%20had%20intended%20that,Maslach%2C%20a%20recent%20Stanford%20Ph.or.org/mod/page/view.php?id=36193#:~:text=Zimbardo%20(1973)%20had%20intended%20that,Maslach%2C%20a%20recent%20Stanford%20Ph)> [accessed 12 January 2024].

EVALUATE THE VIEW THAT POETRY AND FILM DISTORT OUR VIEW OF WAR

by Malak N

Poetry and films, among other kinds of media, have a big impact on how we view war in the modern world. These media have the ability to romanticise or sensationalise war, which can change and distort how we see it. The complicated phenomenon of war has frequently appeared in poetry and films. Many claim that the combination of these two media distorts our understanding of war, which has caused significant controversy. Nonetheless, the portrayal of war in poetry and film offers an opportunity to investigate what it means to be human in the midst of conflict. I will explore the connected worlds of poetry and film depictions of war in this essay, looking at how they impact and mould our perception of crucial periods in human history, eventually attempting to figure out the complex relationship between artistic imagery and the reality of war.

Poetry and films frequently romanticise or glorify the experience of fighting, which is one reason they distort our perception of war. For instance, war poetry frequently presents soldiers as courageous heroes fighting for a just cause; one example is Alfred Tennyson's poem 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'.⁰¹ Furthermore, intense battle scenes and action sequences are often portrayed in war films, which can give the impression that war is exciting and thrilling rather than terrifying and devastating. This distortion of war may have serious consequences. They have the potential to teach false perceptions and expectations to the public as well as in those who are directly engaged in war, such as soldiers.

Moreover, the fetishization of war imagery and the objectification of suffering through film and photography further contributes to the distortion of our view of war. The public is becoming less sensitive to the realities of war as a result of the ongoing bombard of war imagery on different media platforms.⁰² We are no longer as capable of responding ethically or feeling compassion for the victims of war as we once were. Also, the experience of war has become trivialised and commercialised due to the use of war imagery in entertainment.⁰³ The audience

⁰¹ Florentina C. Andreescu, 'War, trauma and the militarized body', *Subjectivity*, 9.2 (2016), 205-223.

⁰² Matteo Stocchetti, 'Images and power in the digital age: the political role of digital visibility', *Kome*, 2.2 (2014), 1-16.

⁰³ Nicolette Barsdorf-Liebchen, 'Book review: memory of fire: images of war and the war of images', *Media, War & Conflict*, 7.1 (2014) 121-126.

may become disengaged from the actual effects of conflict as a result of the trivialisation and commercialisation of war, which makes it simpler to ignore or overlook the devastation and human suffering caused by war. Once again, the distortion of our view of war through poetry and film is not a new phenomenon. It has been noted by theorists like Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin and highlighted in Susan Sontag's analysis of the Vietnam War, that the distortion of war through visual representations has a long history.⁰⁴

Additionally, the increase of these distorted representations of war can also impact children and young people, such as my peers and I.⁰⁵ Children are exposed to war and conflict through various forms of media, such as films, photographs, and video games before they fully understand or have it taught to them, we are currently seeing this happen due to the Israel-Palestine war. Their views and comprehension of war may be shaped by this exposure, which may cause them to romanticise or normalise violence.⁰⁶ The impact of this distortion on children, especially those with family members serving in the military, is particularly concerning. The children of soldiers are already vulnerable due to their parent's involvement in war, and the distorted view presented by media can further confuse and traumatise them. Therefore, it is crucial to teach children about war in a critical manner, specifically educating them about visual and media representations of war.⁰⁷

Little scientific research has been conducted on the specific effects of war imagery on audiences.⁰⁸ Still, there is a growing understanding of the importance of assessing and critically analysing how war representations affect people on an individual and societal level. This includes the ability to comprehend the complex nature of war, perceive it realistically, and feel empathy for people impacted by it. The availability and accessibility of war imagery has increased dramatically in recent years due to the introduction of modern technologies and platforms.⁰⁹ A flood of films has resulted from this, which has the potential to desensitise viewers and distance them from the actual horrors of war as they may overlook these real-life events, just calling it a genre, to be precise Wikipedia's compilation of second

⁰⁴ Stocchetti (2014).

⁰⁵ Barsdorf-Liebchen (2014).

⁰⁶ Rebecca McEntee, 'Shooting straight: graphic versus non-graphic war photographs', *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 22.4 (2015), 221-236.

⁰⁷ Brian Gibbs and Jeremy Hilburn, "'no one should see what they have to do': military children and media representations of war", *The Journal of Social Studies Research*, 45.2 (2021), 130-149.

⁰⁸ McEntee (2015).

⁰⁹ Katy Parry, 'Media visualisation of conflict: studying news imagery in 21st century wars', *Sociology Compass*, 4.7 (2010), 417-429.

world war films comes to more than 1,300, and still counting.¹⁰ Additionally, war imagery in poetry and film often prioritises spectacle and entertainment value over depicting the true experiences and consequences of war. This distortion of war can create a misleading and romanticised view of war, making it appear more glamorous and exciting than it truly is.

Moreover, visual consumption continues to grow by the ongoing circulation of war imagery via mainstream media and social media. This cycle further distorts the public's understanding and perception by creating a demand for more sensationalised and distorted representations of war, once again this is seen due to the Israel-Palestine war.¹¹ The politics and aesthetics of war imagery have been the subject of much discussion and debate over the years.¹² Critics argue that viewers may experience a "gory pleasure" due to the graphic nature of war imagery, whether it be in films, photographs, or video games.¹³ Additionally, the aestheticisation of wartime films can normalise deaths and suffering in conflict zones.

On the opposing side, some scholars also argue that the romanticised view of war presented in poetry and film is not inherently detrimental. They argue that by portraying soldiers as brave heroes, these mediums pay homage to their sacrifices and valorise their courage in the face of hardships. War poetry and films, in this view, can serve as a means of honouring the bravery and resilience of those involved in war, offering a form of recognition and respect for their sacrifices. Proponents argue that poetry and film can present a realistic and honest portrayal of war, shedding light on the actual experiences of soldiers and the devastating consequences of conflict. They argue that these mediums serve as a platform for storytelling as well as offering opportunities for exploring alternative perspectives and challenging traditional narratives of war and can effectively convey the human cost of war, evoking empathy and understanding in the audience.

Through the lens of poetry, marginalised voices and untold stories can be brought

¹⁰ Andrew Pulver, *Why are we so obsessed with films about the second world war?* (2014) *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jul/17/why-so-obsessed-second-world-war-films>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

¹¹ Jonathan Dunnage et al., 'Understanding militarism after the end of the cold war: history, international relations, and media studies ask new questions', *History Compass*, 17.12 (2019).

¹² McEntee (2015).

¹³ Marlene S. Altenmüller and Mario Gollwitzer, 'Power of pictures? questioning the emotionalization and behavioral activation potential of aesthetics in war photography', *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 17 (2023).

to the forefront, shedding light on the experiences of those often overlooked in mainstream historical narratives put into films. Poets are able to depict the nuances of war from a variety of personal, cultural, and social perspectives, providing a more inclusive and thorough understanding of the effects of conflict on people. Similarly, filmmakers may present opposing stories that challenge accepted interpretations of war. Filmmakers can challenge viewers' assumptions about what defines a war by emphasising the complexity of moral ambiguity or focusing on lesser-known aspects of warfare.

Additionally, some suggest that exposure to war imagery during childhood can prompt critical conversations and discussions about the reality of war. They argue that parents and educators can use age-appropriate war-related poetry and film as a starting point to educate children about the complexities and consequences of conflict, in order to raise a generation of children who are more aware and informed.

To conclude, while the potential for distortion in the representation of war through poetry and film is a valid concern, it is necessary to consider the counterarguments that emphasise the potential for these mediums to provide alternative perspectives, challenge traditional narratives, and offer a more comprehensive understanding of conflict. Through exploring the captivating qualities of poetry and film, I can perceive the frequently hidden details of war and gain new perspectives on its enormous impact on both individuals and society as a whole. However, from my point of view, I agree with the view that poetry and film distort our way of viewing war because many people who see war depicted in poetry and films often call it a genre, overlooking the human story and suffering behind it, eventually they are often looking forward to the suffering and torment without acknowledging the immense suffering and devastating consequences.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION SHAPE INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES?

by Lexi O

Prejudice is a “preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience”,⁰¹ and discrimination is when someone is treated differently based on a characteristic/trait they cannot control like their sex, ethnicity and gender (the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of ethnicity, age, sex, or disability).⁰² Examples of prejudice and discrimination include things such as racial profiling (when someone is targeted for only their race and not for their actions) and homophobia (disliking someone based on their sexuality; refusing to help them, talking down to them etc.).

Prejudice is not often formed all by oneself, usually, it is taught or observed before becoming part of someone’s character. For example, a baby is entirely dependent on their parent, they learn from them and listen to them (most of the time..), and they also copy them, especially from a young age, so if a baby were to see their parents yelling slurs at a transgender person and hearing said parents tell them to not accept them, the child will take that on board and listen to their parents. In turn, when the child grows up and encounters a transgender person, they will copy what their parents did and treat them awfully and with disdain. This is reinforced by a study performed by Giuseppe Carus at the University of Roma in Italy. Giuseppe said that: “Our research revealed that parents are powerful vehicles of ethnic prejudice transmission towards their children... Not only through their explicit communications and actions but also through their unaware and unconscious beliefs, stereotypes and automatic behaviours.”⁰³ Therefore, if someone’s parents have prejudiced ideas, they will easily pass it on to their children, and it doesn’t particularly matter if they “hear their dads raging about immigration, hurling invective, or dropping the odd slur”, studies suggest it becomes an unconscious

⁰¹ ‘Prejudice’ (n.d.) *Oxford Dictionaries* <<https://premium-oxforddictionaries-com.lonlib.idm.oclc.org/definition/english/prejudice>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

⁰² ‘Discrimination’ (n.d.), *Oxford Dictionaries* <<https://premium-oxforddictionaries-com.lonlib.idm.oclc.org/definition/english/discrimination>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

⁰³ Joshua A. Krisch, *New Data Shows How Parents Accidentally Pass on Racial Prejudice to Kids* (2021), *Fatherly* <<https://www.fatherly.com/parenting/kids-learn-racism-prejudice-from-parents#:~:text=Children%20learn%20prejudice%20from%20their%20parents%20a%20new,pass%20those%20along%20to%20their%20kids%20as%20well.>>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

decision.⁰⁴

Once a child has been influenced from a young and impressionable age, their personality and morals can be very strongly based on those views. Just as children remember the alphabet when they grow, they also hold onto the first opinions and thoughts they can understand. In my opinion, it would not be surprising if someone who has parents with discriminatory views turns out to not only believe them, but also let those beliefs carry into being apart of their overall character. Sometimes the child cannot help it, after all Giuseppe Carus proved with his study that a child can be unconsciously influenced by bias in which case their identity and personality have been thoroughly affected.⁰⁵

There are also cases where people take their prejudiced views and are able to spread them. They can do this based on how confident or persuasive they are, and if the person is in a position of great power and influence then they can very easily control what people believe and think. Additionally, people with prejudice and power find themselves able to control how much people know about what they are against. For example, in the play *Romeo and Juliet*, the two houses are against each other (Capulets and Montagues) and the monarchs specifically despise each other. From this, they use their hatred for each other to fuel the people who listen to them (their subjects) with discriminatory views about the other in order to gain support.⁰⁶

This is referenced in *Romeo and Juliet* when Juliette realises Romeo is a Montague. She says “my only love sprung from my only hate” (Act 1, Scene 5, line 137).⁰⁷ The one time she met Romeo, she fell in love with him, she didn’t know who he was and yet she was willing to spend the rest of her life with him. The one time she meets a Montague, she finds she likes them. But then, because of the prejudice that has been instilled in her, we get a sense that she can overlook all of what she feels towards him solely because she feels almost wired to hate all Montagues. Juliet is the daughter of the ruler of the Capulets, and so was told from a young age that she should hate the Montagues and without even knowing or meeting them, should view them with disdain. Juliet doesn’t address why she hates the Montagues, in fact, no one in the play directly does, it is only known that they do. Their feud was apparently an “ancient grudge” (Act 1, Prologue, line 3) and

⁰⁴ Krisch (2021).

⁰⁵ Giuseppe Carrus et al., ‘A Chip Off the Old Block: Parents’ Subtle Ethnic Prejudice Predicts Children’s Implicit Prejudice’, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9.110 (2018) 1-10.

⁰⁶ David Alberts, *How is prejudice expressed in Romeo and Juliet?* (2019), enotes <<https://www.enotes.com/topics/romeo-and-juliet/questions/examine-how-prejudice-is-expressed-in-romeo-and-83575>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

⁰⁷ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by René Weis (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2012) p.178.

this hints that people either don't remember how their fights started or weren't exactly told and it promotes the idea that it doesn't matter how much time has passed, because neither side changes how they act.⁰⁸ Most of the Montagues and Capulets didn't meet until they were viciously fighting, but they knew they hated each other. The characters in *Romeo and Juliet* could change their opinion on the people they love simply because of where they are from or who they are, or what they represent.

I think this is reflected in real life, many people can be cordial with those around them, without even knowing them, but when they find something that they don't like or can't accept, they almost force themselves to change their opinion. This is because what they have been told has been challenged, and they don't know how to respond to it, they find themselves liking what they always swore to hate, and they realise they have been told to be against something and have never stopped to ask themselves why. Because they were told something repeatedly from a young age, they never stopped to question it, and they allowed it to be a part of their character and identity. They spread the misinformed and discriminatory ideas they were once infected with because they were told them with such confidence they never stopped to question them.

In conclusion, I believe that the people around us influence each other's prejudiced views, especially if those people are in positions of power or have the opportunity to influence people from a young age. Just hearing, listening, and being around discrimination can unknowingly affect a person. This is exemplified by the study where children were proven to have had their parent's ideas transmitted to them. Therefore, I think someone's character can be very heavily influenced by the people around them and therefore can shape who they are as people. This is not to say a child can easily disagree with their parents for one reason or another, however, I think if someone has been fuelled with prejudiced ideas from a young age, their character will be deeply affected and this will shape them as a person.

⁰⁸ Shakespeare, p. 123.

IS HUMAN NATURE ‘GOOD’ OR ‘EVIL’?

by Eden P

Whether human nature is good or evil is a question that has puzzled philosophers, theologians and psychologists for thousands of years. This essay aims to outline and discuss some of the greatest theories in this existential question. First I will look at how this relates to religion, then at how language shapes our views and finish by touching on psychology experiments and human nature. Good and evil have different meanings to everybody but one of the most trusted dictionaries, the OED, defines these words as:

‘good’

“**adj.**(better, best) **1** having the right qualities; of a high standard. **2** morally right, polite or obedient. **3** enjoyable or satisfying. **4** appropriate”.⁰¹

‘evil’

“**adj.** **1** very immoral and wicked. **2** very unpleasant. n. **1** extreme wickedness. **2** something harmful or undesirable”.⁰²

Historically the word ‘evil’ has very strong associations with religion because evil is connected with original sin. Original sin is the belief within Christianity that Adam and Eve were innocent until they ate an apple from the Tree of Knowledge. Therefore, it’s a Christian belief, that all humans from then onwards are born sinful. The first time the word evil is mentioned in the Bible is in Genesis 2:17,

“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”⁰³

Religion has been the bed rock of society for many generations. Shaping its culture and its norms in much greater ways than it does now. So, many have believed that human nature was evil due to Adam and Eve.⁰⁴ It is interesting that the word ‘evil’ is used in this essay title rather than the word bad, because of these religious connotations. People have different opinions on human nature being good or evil depending on their religious beliefs and their culture. I personally don’t believe that all humans are born sinful therefore this essay will discuss other theories

⁰¹ ‘good’, *Oxford English Mini Dictionary*, 8th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 246.

⁰² ‘evil’, *Oxford English Mini Dictionary*, 8th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 195.

⁰³ *Holy Bible*, English Standard Version (London: Crossway Bibles, 2007), Genesis 2.17.

⁰⁴ Alex McFarland, *What does the Bible say about evil?* (2016), Crosswalk <<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/what-does-the-bible-say-about-evil.html>> [accessed 14 January 2024].

about human nature being good or evil.

“There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so”⁰⁵ (Act 2, Scene 2, line 250-1)

In this famous quote from *Hamlet*, Shakespeare is suggesting that language is limiting because labelling is a human construct. In this quote, Hamlet is talking to his friends Guildenstern and Rosencrantz about Elsinore. Hamlet is unhappy with recent events and that’s why he doesn’t like Elsinore, which is not the case for his friends. These are both subjective opinions, not to do with the city but what is happening to them in the city. Just as Hamlet and his friends’ views are subjective, so are the words used in this essay question. There is a huge spectrum of good and evil such as having a good sandwich compared to someone who is a good person for saving a life. Using the words good and evil in this essay question is a limiting way to talk about human nature as human actions and feelings are extremely nuanced. Human nature – the actions and behaviour of humans - is as individual and varied as humans themselves and often words don’t do it justice.

Humankind has created words and labels and it is thought that using these can limit our experiences and how others view us. This is called linguistic determinism, “Linguistic determinism is the concept that language and its structures limit and determine human knowledge or thought, as well as thought processes such as people’s native languages will affect their thought process and therefore people will have different thought processes based on their mother tongues.”⁰⁶ Categorizing human nature as good and evil seems too simplistic because it doesn’t allow for nuance.

Friedrich Nietzsche, a German philosopher, believes that humans have the ability to be both good and evil. Nietzsche believes good and evil are “different expressions of the same nature”.⁰⁷ What Nietzsche idea of good is “using positions of power and high class privilege to help those who are disadvantaged and at a lower position in society than us, and ‘evil’ being the exact opposite.”⁰⁸ Nietzsche believes it is possible for any one human to do both good and evil deeds.

Nietzsche’s views about using power for good or evil can be demonstrated by

⁰⁵ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works* (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1998) p. 305.

⁰⁶ *Linguistic determinism* (2023) Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistic_determinism#cite_note-1> [accessed 12 January 2024].

⁰⁷ Maria Popova, *Beyond Good and Evil: Nietzsche on Love, Perseverance, and the True Mark of Greatness* (n.d.) *The Marginalian* <<https://www.themarginalian.org/2020/11/04/beyond-good-and-evil-nietzsche/>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

⁰⁸ Apurva Joshi, *The Good, Bad, and Evil — A Look At a Few Nietzsche’s Philosophies* (2020) *Medium* <<https://writetoapurva.medium.com/the-good-bad-and-evil-a-look-at-a-few-of-nietzsches-philosophies-a613f9096422>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

psychological experiments. I watched a few psychological experiments to help me write this essay and the most striking was the Stanford Prison Experiment.⁹ To summarise this experiment, Professor Philip Zimbardo placed students as 'prisoners' or 'guards' to see how they'd react in different positions of power. The experiment was supposed to last day and night for two weeks but due to the extremely harsh treatment towards 'prisoners' it only lasted six days. Doug Korpi, who was experiment prisoner 8612, said "I've never screamed so loud in my life, I've never been so upset in my life."¹⁰ This goes to show that some experiments are scarring for the people who take part and the person who runs the experiment has so much power over people's lives that it could be argued too much power for one person. Some consider it evil to use a person in an experiment where it could be dangerous to them or their mental health. Even if it is considered for the greater good and for science many academics are questioning if these types of experiments should be allowed. This experiment is trying to show what human nature is capable of but in doing so creates an evil behaviour.

Another way to look at human nature is to take away all of the experiences, language and influences and to look at babies. Babies are often considered innocent as they are pre-language.¹¹ Society and culture have not influenced them yet. Human nature is the thing that makes us different from animals, but when we are very young we have survival instincts, like animals. For example, babies trying to get food or keep warm, means babies aren't intending to be good or evil they are just trying to survive and if their actions are interpreted that way then that is accidental. So, when humans are this young their nature cannot be good or evil. As Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher said, we are born "amoral creatures" and our morality is learnt.¹²

Society, religion and culture will start to influence children as they age and, possibly, they will be taught to act a good or evil way or consider certain behaviour good or evil. For example, some religious groups consider it evil to be LGBT+ and this is reflected in some countries' laws where it is illegal.¹³ The world around us massively affects how we think, feel and act which influences our nature as humans.

⁹ *The Stanford Prison Experiment*, BBC2, 11 May 2002, 22:00, online video recording, YouTube <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4txhN13y6A>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

¹⁰ *The Stanford Prison Experiment*, BBC2, 11 May 2002, 22:00.

¹¹ Gerald P. Perman, *Jacques Lacan: The Best and Least Known Psychoanalyst* (2018), *Psychiatric Times* <<https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/jacques-lacan-best-and-least-known-psychoanalyst>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

¹² Tom Aglietti, *Are we born good or evil? (naughty or nice)* (n.d.), BBC Earth <<https://www.bbcearth.com/news/are-we-born-good-or-evil-naughty-or-nice>> [accessed 12th January 2024].

¹³ Peter Laverack, *Criminalising Homosexuality and Understanding the Right to Manifest Religion* (London: Human Dignity Trust, 2015).

To what extent our environments influence us is a regular topic in psychological research, known as nature versus nurture. Many studies have tried to discover which is more important. One that resonated with me was a study of twins. Twins, Oskar Stohr and Jack Yufe (born 1933), had a German mother and a Jewish father. Separated shortly after birth, Stohr went to Germany, grew up a Nazi Catholic and joined The Hitler Youth. Whereas Yufe was raised in Trinidad as a Jew. They were reunited as adults and their idiosyncrasies, taste buds and speech patterns were very similar. They disagreed about World War II and politics but as Professor Segal said “They were repelled and fascinated by each other” and had an “extraordinary love-hate relationship”.¹⁴ This shows that nature and nurture both affect the people we turn out to be. Naziism is evil and as identical twins we could conclude that both were capable of becoming evil if pushed to it by their environment.

In conclusion, I believe everybody has the power to be good or evil and everybody has acted in good and evil ways at some point. However, the words good and evil are binary concepts, and there is a huge spectrum to what these words can mean. Using these terms limits our understanding of human nature.

“What is done out of love always takes place beyond good and evil.” (Nietzsche)¹⁵

¹⁴ Justin Carissimo, *Jewish man who reunited with his Nazi twin brother dies* (2015), *The Independent* <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/jewish-man-who-reunited-with-his-nazi-twin-brother-dies-a6732421.html>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Chichester: Wiley, 2020) p. 87.

IS HUMAN NATURE GOOD OR EVIL?

by Lillian A

Whether human nature is good or evil is a concept that has been debated by philosophers for centuries. It has been quite a controversial discussion since it puts our species at the very centre of the matter and is very subjective. Human nature is defined as the belief that humans have natural instincts and tendencies regarding the ways in which they think, feel and behave. To be good is to have compassion towards others, to be able to empathise and lack self-centredness while showing kindness and thinking of others before yourself. On the other hand, to be evil is to lack the ability to empathise with others, to think of yourself only and feel no guilt or shame towards harming and causing suffering to others, resulting in your needs and desires to be of paramount importance regardless of how the consequences may affect other people. I believe that humans are all born good by nature, and moving forward, are then influenced by the environment they are a part of and past experiences that shape the way in which they perceive the world, to choose whether they continue to be good or to think and behave in an evil manner.

For so many years, philosophers have been revisiting this question and have repeatedly faced contradicting views and opinions regarding human nature. For example, Aristotle argued that morality is learned, and that we're born as "amoral creatures", while Sigmund Freud considered newborns a moral blank slate.⁰¹ Perhaps two of the most famous opposing views regarding this debate are those of the 17th and 18th century philosophers Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Hobbes describes humans as 'nasty' and 'brutish', believing that society and rules are necessary in order to improve our bad nature and thrive.⁰² Later, Rousseau countered his remarks, arguing instead that humans are gentle and pure beings, blaming society for corrupting our inherent good nature by imposing the class system, causing greed and inequality.⁰³

Historically, most of the world has been divided into one of the two arguments presented by Hobbes and Rousseau, in relation to the morality debate. Another very influential philosopher, from the classical period in China, Xunzi, has also visited this question regarding human nature. Xunzi's most famous finding is that "the nature of man is evil; his goodness is only acquired training."⁰⁴ What Xunzi

⁰¹ Tom Aglietti, *Are we born good or evil? (naughty or nice)* (n.d.), BBC Earth <<https://www.bbcearth.com/news/are-we-born-good-or-evil-naughty-or-nice>> [accessed 8 January 2024].

⁰² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 84.

⁰³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Bernard Bosanquet, *The Social Contract: Or, Principles of Political Right* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1895).

⁰⁴ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, *Xunzi* (2017), *Encyclopedia Britannica* <<https://>

explains here is essentially a philosophy of culture. Human nature at birth, he states, consists of propensities which, when left unaltered, are selfish, disordered, and inconsiderate. However, the society that surrounds the individual promotes a civilizing influence upon them, gradually training and shaping them until they become a morally conscious and civilised human being. However, psychology has uncovered some insightful evidence that may begin to twist these theories that humans are naturally evil or that they are born without a moral conscience.

Innovative experiments carried out at Yale University used the measure of good and evil motivations to look at babies' minds.⁰⁵ The results suggest that babies are in fact born with a sense of morality and an instinct to choose good over evil. While parents and society contribute to developing a belief system, newborns certainly don't seem to start from a blank slate. The experiment carried out was a kind of puppet show, including a bright green hill in the background with cut out shapes as the puppets. There was a triangle, a square and a circle, each in bright colours. There then proceeded to be a short play about one of the shapes struggling to climb the hill and falling back down again. Next, the other two shapes got involved, with one helping the climber to go up the hill by pushing up from behind, and the other restraining and going against the climber by pushing back from above.

After the show, the babies were given the choice of reaching for either the helping or restraining shape, and it was revealed that they were much more likely to reach for the helping shape. This can be explained as the events of the show are presented in terms of motivations; the shapes aren't just moving at random, instead showing the baby that the shape pushing uphill wants to help out (and is good) while the shape pushing downhill wants to cause problems (and is evil).

A 2017 study from Kyoto University had a similar approach and result to the puppet experiment, more or less confirming these results.⁰⁶ Babies as young as six months were shown videos displaying three Pacman-like characters, the 'bully' who would bump aggressively against the 'victim' and squash it into a wall, and an 'agent'. The agent would sometimes intervene to help the victim by putting itself between the victim and the bully but could also sometimes run away instead. After watching the video, children chose their preferred character and most tended to choose the intervening agent who attempted to help the victim.

In conclusion, it's safe to say that by nature, humans are not evil but are rather easily influenced by their surroundings and the experiences they have as part of a society to act in an evil way. The difference here is that, we have the freedom

www.britannica.com/biography/Xunzi> [accessed 8 January 2024].

⁰⁵ Algetti.

⁰⁶ Matt Burgess, *'Bully' study reveals babies have an innate sense of justice* (2017), *Wired* <<https://www.wired.com/story/babies-understand-hero-actions/>> [accessed 8 January 2024].

to choose. You may choose to overcome the evil in the world, you can choose to heal from experiences that have harmed you, you have the ability to oversee all the evil that surrounds us and choose which road you take. We're all born to go through, recognise and differentiate between good and evil. What we weren't born to be is an evil person, but we have the choice to change as we get older in our specified environments, societies, and experiences. With regards to human nature, I maintain that we are all born good and have pure intentions, however, as we go along life, we experience things that may alter how we think, feel, and behave. Yet, somewhere in between those lines, is the freedom to choose, and that is where I believe, we see true human nature.

ARE HUMANS GOOD OR EVIL?

by Nikita B

In the English dictionary, the word ‘good’ means, “that which is morally right; righteousness”.⁰¹ This means that we could define human nature as ‘good’ if our actions are “morally right” and helpful to society. Moreover, the word ‘evil’ means, “profoundly immoral and wicked”.⁰² As humans, if our actions are immoral and do not benefit others, we are considered ‘evil’. Some people may go by these definitions of the words, however, many other people would believe differently, for example Mengzi.

Mengzi believed that humans were born with four seeds.⁰³ He believed that with the right conditions, and environment around someone, the values of compassion, shame, respect, and the way that one can tell what is right and what is wrong can grow and develop much like a seed can. He gave an example and said that if one is in danger and we were to help them, the fact that we did it does not come from the fact that we are selfish but rather the seed of compassion. Mengzi, like many other people, believes that it is not the person and their brain that tells them what is right and wrong but rather how we grew up and the environment that we lived in as a young child. As a young child, if you are only exposed to immoral behaviour the chances are likely that you are going to believe that this is normal and subsequently partake in immoral deeds. By the same token, a young child that grew up in a healthy and safe environment will believe and understand that immoral behaviour is wrong.

There is, however, a case of a murder that challenged this idea: the case of Lucy Letby. In 2015-2016, Lucy Letby attacked thirteen babies in different ways.⁰⁴ She was a nurse at the Countess of Chester Hospital, and she was harming these babies at the hospital. Fortunately, seven of the babies survived these attacks. Many people would believe that she would have come from abusive family, thus supporting Mengzi’s idea that for compassion and the idea of what right and wrong were should come from a safe environment not an abusive one, but, perhaps

⁰¹ *Good* (n.d.), *Oxford Dictionaries* <<https://premium-oxforddictionaries-com.lonlib.idm.oclc.org/definition/english/good>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

⁰² *evil* (n.d.), *Oxford Dictionaries* <<https://premium-oxforddictionaries-com.lonlib.idm.oclc.org/definition/english/evil>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

⁰³ Jonny Thomson, *The moral mystery of serial killers with no evident mental illness or trauma* (2023), *Big Think* <<https://bigthink.com/thinking/are-we-born-evil/>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

⁰⁴ The Crown Prosecution Service, *Lucy Letby found guilty of baby murders* (2023), *CPS News Centre* <<https://www.cps.gov.uk/mersey-cheshire/news/lucy-letby-found-guilty-baby-murders>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

surprisingly, she came from what seemed to be a loving and comfortable family. This clearly contradicts Mengzi's idea and begs the question of what made her do these awful things. In conclusion, some people may have a good environment to live in and a healthy family but still commit murder and many other awful things thus making us wonder is human nature good or evil?

In addition, if God created the world and all living things, then shouldn't it follow that we should all be good, moral beings as surely this was his aim? After every time he created something, the bible says that "(And) God saw that it was good".⁰⁵ This begs the question of why the world around us has aspects that clearly aren't good. Worse still, there are aspects of society that are decidedly evil. Why are their horrific criminals, rapists, and murderers? In today's society, there are many criminals and many, many people who have done sinful things and this suggests that humans aren't intrinsically good as God intended. Some people may believe that God's intention was to create all things positive and when he first created the world.⁰⁶ However, in Genesis, Adam and Eve were accounted to be the first humans on the planet and they committed sin as they were tempted by the devil in a form of a snake.⁰⁷ They were told not to eat from the tree and, after being tempted, Eve ate from the tree and then so did Adam. This means right at the time God was creating all, there was evil as exemplified from the devil in disguise as a snake and there was sin, shown by Adam and Eve. This proves to us that humans were doomed from the start and that we are easily tempted into doing horrific things even when we are made clear not to do them. This perhaps proves that humans are just as fundamentally evil as we are good.

It is interesting to note that humans do have some innately good qualities. For example, humans are one of the only animals that protect their young, help them grow, nurture them and give them shelter and food.⁰⁸ Most humans (not all of course) continue to teach their young fundamental skills for when they are older in life. As a human, one would move out of the house, legally at the age of 18 when they are an adult but some animals like the snake, abandon them at birth or even when they are still in their egg.⁰⁹ For example, the snake has not maternal instinct and right from giving birth to them/ after laying them the mother snake will just slither away, never to be seen again. This is fine from a survival

⁰⁵ *Holy Bible*, English Standard Version (London: Crossway Bibles, 2007), Genesis 1.10.

⁰⁶ Aaron Armstrong, *Why Did God Call Creation "Good?"* (2019), *Lifeway* <<https://gospel-project.lifeway.com/god-creation-good/>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

⁰⁷ *Holy Bible*, English Standard Version (London: Crossway Bibles, 2007), Genesis 3.1-7.

⁰⁸ Belinda Luscombe, *How Child Care Made Children Smart* (2016), *Time* <<https://time.com/4345453/childcare-intelligence-humans-study/>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

⁰⁹ Caryn Anderson, *Animals whose mothers abandon them after birth* (n.d.), *Pets on Mom* <<https://animals.mom.com/animals-mothers-abandon-after-birth-9940.html>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

point of view as the baby snake from the moment it's born is able to take care of themselves unlike a human. Another example, is that pandas normally have twins but the mother will always abandon one depending on which one has the best chance of survival.¹⁰ Unlike these animals, humans are mostly there for their young and therefore have some very good attributes. Thus, exemplifying the maternal instinct in humans and the instinct to protect their young from the dangers of the world around us. This proves to us that humans do in fact have some excellent qualities and therefore leads me to believe that humans are intrinsically good.

Overall, this essay has made me believe that humans are neither good nor evil. I believe that humans are shaped into the way they act (whether they are good or evil) by the society and the environment around them, therefore, I agree with Mengzi's idea. I don't believe that God has made us good and the fact that he created the world doesn't mean that he is responsible for the good in humans. In life there are some people who aren't good and who do unbelievably horrific things and I believe that they are like this because of their upbringing and maybe the fact their parents neglected them. Perhaps there are also some anomalies like Lucy Letby, but I believe that if we dug deep enough, we would find some sort of neglect or abuse in her past too. To conclude, as a young child, when you are learning what is good and evil, that is when the things you see around you, the environment that you are in, affect you the most and cause you to believe what is right and what is wrong. Ultimately, it is nurture rather than nature that shapes a human – their environment shapes individuals into the people they will become.

¹⁰ Anderson.

IS HUMAN NATURE GOOD OR EVIL?

By Isobel B

I believe human nature is neither good nor evil as these are subjective concepts that depend on one's cultural, societal, and personal beliefs.

Who can decide what good or evil is? How do you place different cultures and beliefs into those categories? There are examples of both in the world; which ones do you include? I would like to explore these questions but looking at three different, but related points. Firstly, I will argue that there is no objective, universally agreed definition of good and evil. Secondly, I will show that despite this, there are some generally agreed principles of what good and evil are. Thirdly, I will show some of the arguments that philosophers and scientists have used when debating these fundamental questions.

Firstly, it is often when people feel most strongly about whether something is good or evil, that they disagree. For example, people have such strong beliefs about good or evil when linked to their religion; so strong that they would go to war for it; so strong that they would fast for 161 days and live on a near-death experience just to prove their devotion to their God. However, although humans have such a strong devotion to their individual faith, there still is a massive difference in morals between them, even within the same religion. For example, the Old Testament, states that “whoever would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman.”.⁰¹ Many branches of Christianity fully believe what is said in the Old Testament, such as a Jehovah's Witnesses. Similarly, Christian groups such as Marcionites say that God is, “inconsistent, jealous, wrathful and genocidal”.⁰² On the other hand, in the New Testament, God is portrayed as understanding and kind to everyone - whether they were believers or not. This is shown in the New Testament when Jesus says, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you”.⁰³ It is difficult to imagine Jesus and the God of the New Testament believing that wiping out almost every human being on earth (the flood) as anything other than evil. There's a contradiction even within the same religion about what is good and evil, without even starting on the comparisons between different religions.

Furthermore, what people see as good and evil in human nature has fundamentally changed over time. Two thousand years ago, slavery was a completely accepted part

⁰¹ *Holy Bible*, English Standard Version (London: Crossway Bibles, 2007), 2 Chronicles 15.12-13.

⁰² *Marcionism* (n.d.), *The Gnostic Jesus* <<http://www.gnostic-jesus.com/gnostic-jesus/Early-gnostics/Marcionism.html>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

⁰³ *Holy Bible*, English Standard Version (London: Crossway Bibles, 2007), Luke 6.27.

of life. More recently, there has been a dramatic shift in in how women are seen in society and the law in much of the western world. Previously, it was deemed that it was 'good' for women to stay at home and help take care of children, cook and clean. Only an 'evil' woman would not make her children and home her first priority. However, now it is seen as good that women are given the choice. Over the years, the concept of good and evil has changed to fit the norm at the time - but not universally, demonstrating that there is no single concept of good and evil. Currently, 68.4% of women around the world still have unequal rights in comparison to men and the definition of good and evil from different eras to different countries can clearly be seen to be inconsistent and constantly adapting.⁰⁴

However, even though there is no objective, absolute definition of good and evil, some common themes of what is generally seen as good and evil have emerged across different cultures and different times. The Oxford English dictionary defines good as: "to help, benefit, or do a service to (a person)"⁰⁵ and defines evil as: "morally depraved, bad, wicked and vicious as applied to persons".⁰⁶ For example, the general understanding that donating to and volunteering for charities is seen pretty much universally as morally good while stealing is generally considered morally wrong across almost every culture in human history.

This sense of a general sense of good and evil that children are brought up with, was confirmed by an experiment carried out at Yale University that revealed that, "even the youngest humans have a sense of right or wrong, and, furthermore, an instinct to prefer good over evil".⁰⁷ Therefore, even if we don't believe good or evil is objective, we still have a general understanding from birth of some collective principles of right and wrong. However, it is clear that there are too many contradictory examples in the world of both to pick just a few to define human nature as one or the other.

Therefore, it is not surprising that for thousands of years, philosophers have debated whether we have "basically good nature that is corrupted by society, or basically bad nature kept in check by society".⁰⁸ I believe that we do have good nature at heart but in the end, evil nature will dominate. Lu Wang, (1139-1142) a Chinese Philosopher wrote, "Human nature is originally good. Any evil in it results from the

⁰⁴ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2023* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2023) p. 10.

⁰⁵ *Good* (n.d.), *Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=good&tl=true>> [accessed 8 October 2023].

⁰⁶ *Evil* (n.d.), *Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=evil>> [accessed 8 October 2023].

⁰⁷ Tom Stafford, *Are we naturally good or bad?* (2013), *BBC Future* <<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20130114-are-we-naturally-good-or-bad>> [accessed 10 January 2024].

⁰⁸ Stafford.

changes made upon it by external things. Of man's first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste brought death into the world for all our woe."⁹ He believed that every person exists with good somewhere, whether it's as simple as understanding someone's pain or having a moral compass, everyone has the opportunity to be good. Lu Wang also believed that in the end humans have been forced into a selfish way by society and the evil and cruel will win. Even in his early days in a very young world, Lu wang has described, in my opinion, the perfect way of describing our nature, good is always there until it loses, and evil is the only option left.

Scientists have also expressed their views on this subject. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins described the implications of his findings as: "gene selfishness will usually give rise to selfishness in individual behaviour".¹⁰ He argued that the human species will mostly choose themselves over each other. However, it also leads us to look after our children for longer than any other species or protect older or disabled members of our family and wider community more than any other species would ever consider.

Ultimately, it is impossible to suggest a possibly negative human species because in each person is a combination of good and evil. Human nature, however, it was created, is imperfect. We all face a range of emotions from joy to jealousy, but in the end, every person is different, every person has their flaws. Judging the whole human species on a few ranges of emotions and acts would be denying them of their individuality, I believe that's what makes humans who we are.

To conclude, I believe humans are neither good nor evil, as every human comes with a range and they choose how to present their definitions, they choose - if any - what religion they follow and what morals they believe in, we choose how we are or aren't corrupted by society as we, as individuals, have our own beliefs and we, as individuals, have the choice.

⁹ Lu Wang (n.d.), *Smithsonian American Art Museum*, <<https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/human-nature-originally-good-any-evil-it-results-14241#:~:text=Title-,Human%20nature%20is%20originally%20good.,and%20John%20Milton%27s%20Paradise%20Lost.>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

¹⁰ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) p. 3.

IS HUMAN NATURE GOOD OR EVIL?

by Aida D

This age-old question has been delved into and sparked debate between countless scholars, philosophers, and theologians throughout history. By exploring through this famous query, we deepen our understanding of the various aspects towards what it means to be human. Are we endowed with pure hearts, born with a sense of empathy? Or are we born with an innate appeal to evil?

This nuanced topic is complex because of the multiple viewpoints from various religions, attitudes towards the question, cultures, and societies. Whilst on the journey through whether human nature is inclined to be good or evil, we will explore across history, anthropology, philosophy, and psychology.

In his philosophical book, 17th-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes argued that in a circumstance with societal constructs being absent – a state of nature – life would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”.⁰¹ He criticises humans as he says they need “society and rules to reign in their instincts in order to thrive”.⁰² Hobbes is saying that humans naturally are evil and only learnt to do good through societal constructs, therefore arguing that human nature is evil.

The concept of the state of nature was also fundamental to 18th-century French philosopher, Jean Jacques-Rousseau. In his work *The Social Contract*, Rousseau passionately criticised and challenged Hobbes’ theory and believed human nature was good, but the purity and goodness of man became corrupted once societal constructs were introduced.⁰³ “The state of nature, Rousseau argued, could only mean a primitive state preceding socialization; it is thus devoid of social traits such as pride, envy, or even fear of others”.⁰⁴

Uniquely, Aristotle and Sigmund Freud claim that mortality is gained and learnt across experiences throughout life. Aristotle said we were all born as ‘amoral’ creatures and Freud considered newborns as a moral blank slate.⁰⁵ Scientists too had confidence in the idea that babies had no moral compass, until recently.

Research has taken place in Yale university and proves that babies are born with

⁰¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 84.

⁰² Tom Aglietti, *Are we born good or evil? (naughty or nice)* (n.d.), BBC Earth <<https://www.bbcearth.com/news/are-we-born-good-or-evil-naughty-or-nice>> [accessed 8 January 2024].

⁰³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Bernard Bosanquet, *The Social Contract: Or, Principles of Political Right* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1895).

⁰⁴ André Munro, *State of nature: political theory* (2023), *Encyclopedia Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/state-of-nature-political-theory>> [accessed 8 January 2024].

⁰⁵ Aglietti.

morality. In an experiment made to replicate the results of a practical conducted in 2010 at Yale, babies under a year old were made to watch a puppet show that had taken place and had consisted of three shapes. The first was trying to climb the hill, the 'evil' second pushed the first down but the 'good' third helped the first up. Afterwards, the babies were made to choose between the 'evil' second shape or the 'good' third shape. All the babies, even as young as seven months, chose the second shape that had behaved in a selfless manner. This proves that young babies do in fact have a moral standing.⁰⁶

If you had found a wallet belonging to a stranger, would you return it? Gustavo Razzetti at Fearless Culture says, "Most people say they would return it to the original owner. But assume others would not. They believe people are not *as* honest as them."⁰⁷ A global-wide experiment was conducted by a group of scientists in forty different countries.⁰⁸ Seventeen thousand wallets were scattered. Most professionals were pleasantly surprised with the results with their low expectations: seventy-two percent of people had returned the wallets.

Lots of people have belief in the idea that 'The enemy lives within'. What this means is that, "Our nature is inherently good. We are born with an ability to distinguish right from wrong. But we are not exempt from acting violently or selfishly."⁰⁹

This can be demonstrated through the Stanford Prison Experiment. The Stanford Prison Experiment took place in August 1971 and was conducted by Dr. Philip Zimbardo.¹⁰ It was a psychological experiment that was a prison simulation and researchers investigated the behaviours and reactions of the volunteers. Participants were paid \$15 a day (now estimated around \$108). Based on assessments of psychological stability, volunteers were assigned the role of prisoner or guard. The first day, the prisoners were arrested by real police and the guards were given mirrored sunglasses and uniforms. Across the next five days, the brutality and abuse increased. The most brutal of the guards, Dave Eshelman, claims that his reason for being so brutal was to help the researchers. He was told he was allowed to inflict physical and mental pain on other human for an experiment and therefore he did. He states that in the background, he could hear researchers

⁰⁶ 'Becoming Social', *Babies: Their Wonderful World*, BBC 2, 3 December 2018, 21:00, online video recording, YouTube <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWzRFLSucQQ>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

⁰⁷ Gustavo Razzetti, *Is the human nature good or evil?* (2019), *Fearless Culture* <<https://www.fearlessculture.design/blog-posts/is-the-human-nature-good-or-evil>> [accessed 8 January 2024].

⁰⁸ Alain Cohn et al., 'Civic honesty around the globe' *Science*, 365 (2019), 70-73 (73).

⁰⁹ Razzetti.

¹⁰ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, *Stanford Prison Experiment* (2023), *Encyclopedia Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/event/Stanford-Prison-Experiment>> [accessed 8 January 2024].

commenting and filming, further encouraging him to act in a malevolent manner. Furthermore, Dave locked a prisoner into a small space for days as punishment because the prisoner had a hunger strike and stopped eating meals. Even though cruelty was encouraged, and being harmful was benefitting the researchers, are Dave's scarring actions excused? Dave himself said, "Was there a point where I stopped acting and started living?".

The Stanford Prison Experiment was inspired by the Milgram Experiment that took place almost exactly 10 years earlier.¹¹ The main concept was that two people were assigned the role of teacher or student. The student was asked questions by the teacher and when answered incorrectly, the teacher had to electrocute the student. As time went on, the voltage of the electric shocks increased. The teacher and student were told that the knowledge of the 'student' was being investigated but, in reality, the behaviour of the teacher was being observed. When the electric shock was sent to the student, the teacher could hear the pain that was being inflicted on the student. Researchers were watching to see if the teacher would stop the electric shocks. They had estimated for one tenth of people to continue the lethal shocks but unexpectedly, around 50% of people continued sending the shocks.

If humans weren't evil, why would they have it in them to inflict such harm in such brutal ways?

Ultimately, I think that 'Is human nature good or evil' is a heavily nuanced topic and I can completely understand all viewpoints from different cultures and societies. Science has been able to back up ideas for human nature being good and evil, but I believe human nature is good. I think this because of religious and cultural reasons, but also because I think the baby experiment is most accurate with 100% of babies choosing the 'hero' shape. In addition, I completely understand the thinking that if humans were not evil, then why would they inflict pain on others, however, if humans aren't good, then why are lots empathetic and selfless?

¹¹ Stanley Milgram, 'Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority', *Human Relations*, 18(1) (1965), 57-76.

IS HUMAN NATURE ‘GOOD’ OR ‘EVIL’?

by Carmen L

Human Nature has been argued with for centuries, especially the question, of whether it is ‘good’ or ‘evil’. In the Oxford Dictionary, ‘human nature’ is defined as the “general psychological characteristics, feelings, and behavioural traits of humankind, regarded as shared by all humans”.⁰¹ Overall, human nature’s true intentions are a topic of discussion that philosophers have studied for many years. This essay will focus on different philosophers’ views and experiments as well as my view surrounding this topic, aided by my research.

To begin, two pieces of research that influenced my decision were the Milgram experiment and the Stanford prison experiment. The Milgram experiment was a piece of psychological research which tested the general behaviour of humans, and their ability to stand up against order.⁰² It involved a student and a teacher, where the volunteers picked randomly which they were. However, it was not random, the student was a hired actor, yet the teacher did not know this. The teachers were then shown to another room and asked to administer electric shocks which would potentially be fatal if the student answered a question wrong, each time increasing the voltage. This experiment tested to what extent a person would follow the command to electric shock a stranger just because someone in a white coat and glasses told them to. Before I watched this video on the Milgram Experiment, I naturally assumed that only a few people would continue the experiment until they gave the student a fatal shock, which they were told was causing no long-term damage. However, I discovered that more than 50% of people continued the experiment until the voltage was at 450V (maximum). This was quite a shocking amount as you would presume, that more people would stop the experiment concerned for the student’s safety, however, they followed the orders of a stranger, just because they were seen as knowledgeable and trustworthy. The same was true for the Stanford prison experiment where all the prisoners did not help and support their companions when dominated by the guards, in fear of their own safety.⁰³ This shows that Human nature is obedient in the face of authority, and therefore will not stand up for righteousness when in fear or under command. I would say that this is not necessarily good, however, it is not yet reaching the point of evil. On the other hand, it could be argued that when placed in a difficult

⁰¹ ‘Human nature,’ *Oxford Dictionary*, ed. by A. Stevenson and CA. Jewell, Third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 848.

⁰² *The Heist by Derren Brown*, Channel 4, 4 January 2006, online video recording, YouTube, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6GxIuljT3w>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

⁰³ *The Stanford Prison Experiment*, BBC2, 11 May 2002, 22:00, online video recording, YouTube <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4txhN13y6A>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

position, we automatically forget our moral obligations and our natural instinct takes over. Therefore, in certain instances, we cannot fully control whether we help or do not help someone and thus cannot be held responsible for moral actions during this period.

Another thing to consider is the argument of nature versus nurture. This is an argument of whether humans are born with specific characteristics, or whether they develop them during their lifetime. For context, the nature argument is that we are born a certain way such as, do we naturally have the urge as a child to go for a certain toy due to gender? The nurture argument is whether society or our experiences make us who we are. For example, our guardians raise us in a certain way that influences our natural decision on what toy we choose.⁰⁴

An experiment, carried out by the BBC, questioned whether babies had the natural inclination to understand whether an object or indeed a person is good or evil depending on their actions.⁰⁵ In the experiment babies less than a year old were asked to watch a puppet show and determine the bad shape by if they helped another shape up the hill or pushed it down. After this, the babies were asked whether they wanted to play with the good, yellow triangle or the evil, blue square, and of course, all of them chose the triangle. This experiment displays that babies as young as seven months can understand basic actions and the ability to choose between right and wrong. Therefore, if a baby's natural inclination is to choose moral acts, then we can make a judgement "that, while leaving their children on a desert island is probably still not the best idea, they at least won't try to squash the weakest one with a rock".⁰⁶ In other words, we can assume that the children who prefer good acts (which was all of them) will not themselves commit an immoral act.

Therefore, we can speculate that humans naturally also know the difference between right and wrong actions and would also display the characteristics of babies by choosing the good yellow triangle. However, we should also consider that there are still many 'evil' humans in the world, despite us (most likely) all sharing these characteristics. As a result, we can presume that society or their experiences in life caused this 'evil' and that it is not necessarily the individual's fault. Of course, we created the society we live in, but once started it becomes difficult to fix our environment and ensure no one has the same outcome of

⁰⁴ Tom Aglietti, *Are we born good or evil? (naughty or nice)* (n.d.), BBC Earth <<https://www.bbcearth.com/news/are-we-born-good-or-evil-naughty-or-nice>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

⁰⁵ 'Becoming Social', *Babies: Their Wonderful World*, BBC 2, 3 December 2018, 21:00, online video recording, YouTube <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWzRFLSucQQ>> [accessed 12 January 2024].

⁰⁶ Aglietti.

becoming an 'evil' human.

Furthermore, humans are complex creatures and can be both 'good' and 'evil'.⁰⁷ This is because some factors contribute to our human nature such as; natural instinct and our surroundings. Therefore, since these factors cannot necessarily be our fault (as we cannot control natural instinct and the society we are born into) then we cannot be held responsible for most of it as, changing the problems of society, for example, is exceedingly difficult. Therefore, we are all born with the natural tendency to be 'good' humans, yet this can easily be changed and make us seem like 'evil' creatures.

To conclude, I think that yes, the world around us shapes our personality, whether that is 'good' or 'evil', however, that is not entirely up to us and therefore, not entirely our culpability. So even though some humans are 'evil' we cannot assume that it is their natural tendency but the society they were born into. Hence, we are naturally 'good' but can easily transform into 'evil'.

⁰⁷ Robin Douglass, *Hobbes vs Rousseau: are we inherently evil?* (2019), *iai News* <<https://iai.tv/articles/hobbes-vs-rousseau-are-we-inherently-evil-or-good-auid-1221>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

DOES FILM AND POETRY DISTORT OUR VIEW OF WAR?

By Freya S

In my view, the idea that poetry and film distort our view of war is overly simplistic. Both poetry and film are forms of art. Artists take artistic liberties in their depiction and interpretation of these experiences. As a result, war as depicted in poetry and film shows us various facets of war from the point of view of different people. It is sometimes depicted from the point of view of the soldier, other times from the point of view of the innocent victim or bystander, and sometimes from the point of view of someone whose objective is to motivate others, often for patriotic reasons. As Jackie Craven said, “war poems capture the darkest moments in human history, and the most luminous’ as it ‘explores a range of experiences, celebrating victories, honouring the fallen’.”⁰¹

Together, each of these depictions of war may sometimes be able to tell us the full story of war – in its glory and its brutality. After all, is the view of war distorted if you glorify war, or if you depict it in all its horrific brutal reality? Is there one true and correct view of war? To those fighting for their freedom, war is glorious and perhaps the only option available; that does not, however, take away from the pain and horror of war.

Art, and especially poetry and film have been very successful in spreading the story of war from these different perspectives. For example, poetry is a means to demonstrate the emotional and physiological impact of the bloodshed on the people who were forced to take part, presenting the horrors and traumas faced by the soldiers as a cost of the conflict. Some of these poets were soldiers themselves, writing about their personal experiences from the trenches. There is a lot of truth, especially in the writings by those soldier poets. It is their truth. Can we say that their truth distorts the view of war? Especially where the war in question commenced out of a need to survive as an independent country – a war in the name of duty and patriotism?

Coming to patriotism, poets and film have both been used as a means to motivate soldiers, keep morale high, and encourage tired and scared soldiers to continue the fight. In saying, “If ye break faith with us who die/ We shall not sleep, though poppies grow/ In Flanders Field”,⁰² McCrae tells the weary soldiers that if they do

⁰¹ Jackie Craven, *Great War Poems: From antiquity through the nuclear age, poets respond to conflict* (2018), ThoughtCo. <<https://www.thoughtco.com/great-war-poems-4163585>> [accessed 13 January 2024].

⁰² John McCrae, ‘In Flanders Fields’, *The penguin book of First World War Poetry*, ed. By Jon

not continue the fight and betray him and other soldiers in battle, even when they reach death, they will never find peace, even if they are showered with beautiful flowers. Arguably, this view only benefits the country that wants to pursue war – a form of propaganda almost – and is therefore a distorted view. It is manipulating young men and women and the wider public to support a war they may not wish to be part of. But perhaps this is the truth of that conflict. For example, what is the truth in the Ukraine/Russia conflict?

However, the above romanticism and call to duty was rejected by many soldiers, especially those who endured World War I. Wilfred Owen was a prominent poet and one such soldier who always spoke of gory details and the harsh realities of war. His poem ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’, although translates to ‘it is sweet and honorable’, throughout the poem, defies that notion, telling its readers who are “ardent for some desperate glory” to not fall for the “old lie” that war is “Dulce Et Decorum Est/ Pro Patria Mori”.⁰³ Readers of his poetry don’t come away with any notions of war being romantic, idealistic, or glorious, and that there is honour to die for your country.

As a form of art, poetry allows the poet a direct line to the reader, to connect to the reader in a way that may not be possible through other art forms such as paintings or film which often include multiple stories within one. As mentioned earlier, when told by a soldier, war poetry can also provide a more candid and raw perspective, instead of focusing on the romantic and simplistic side that is often perpetuated through other art forms, especially commercial films. However, although poetry provides powerful insights into the human war experience, it is crucial to recognise its limitations as a form of art. While poetry is expressive, moving poetry often relies on metaphors, similes, and complex language to convey its message. Further, a limitation of it being the poet’s story or perspective is that it is not comprehensive enough to depict the complexities of war; there is hardly any space in a poem to get into all the nuances of a conflict.

In contrast, film, when used to express war, can evoke multiple and nuanced messages of the reality of the conflict. Films have the advantage of time, and often a 2–3-hour long film can portray many untold stories along with being able to depict war in ways poems cannot, for example, depictions of gruesome horrors of war in a scene, without relying on symbolism to demonstrate the poet’s thoughts. For example, I appreciated very much the way the impact of conflict in Northern Ireland in the 1960s was depicted from the point of view of a young boy in the movie *Belfast*.⁰⁴ While it focused on the simple pleasures of childhood being

Silkin, second edition (London: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 85.

⁰³ Wilfred Owen, ‘Dulce et Decorum est’, *War Poems and Others*, ed. by Dominic Hibberd (London: Chatto & Windrus, 1973) p. 79.

⁰⁴ *Belfast*, dir. by Kenneth Branagh (Focus Features, 2021).

threatened by conflict, it also showed the impact of that conflict on the grown-ups, parents, and grandparents, being forced to make hard decisions including leaving their homes for strange lands.

Some films can also be used as propaganda by countries – and can be overly simplistic in their portrayal of good versus bad in war. I think this can be very damaging – showing one side as bad, with no context and no nuances.

Further, in today's world of media and pop culture, movies and screens are where most people get their knowledge of conflict and war. As a form of art, movies can relate to a wider variety of people compared to other art forms (anyone can follow a movie, but you need to be able to read to follow poetry). As a result, many people tend to gravitate towards film over poetry.

In conclusion, films and poetry show us many stories of war. It can shape our perceptions of war and can lead people to reflect on the toll of conflict and the morality of war. Yes, given art involves a level of interpretation, artistic mediums could be used to distort our views of war. Both film and poetry have the capacity to influence our understanding of war by downplaying certain aspects and emphasising others. I feel that while these art forms play an important role in conveying the war experience, one must be alive to the fact that they are able to distort truths. So, if one is after getting a truthful and comprehensive view of war through poetry and film, my conclusion is: that you need to read multiple poems and watch multiple films depicting the same war and then come to your view of that war.

Hopefully, we will all get to a point where we realise war is pointless and have the courage to live in peace.

